



A PASSAGE THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT
PART SEVEN

Second Corinthians

by Jeff S. Smith

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Second Corinthians

Authorship: Paul, A.D. 57

The book of Second Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul (1:1, 16:21) and addressed to the church in Corinth. It was likely written around the year A.D. 55, about six months to a year after he sent the first letter.

Because of Venus's supposed presence, the city was given to sexual immorality and her temple boasted a hundred priestesses dedicated to harlotry. Even the most immoral cities and people of the world looked down on Corinth for her vice.



Corinth had been founded as a Roman colony during the years before Christ's birth, being strategically located between the Aegean and Adriatic seas, making it an ideal hub for the trade routes between east and west. This resulting prosperity, however, led to excessive lifestyles of luxury and immoral experimentation. "To live like a Corinthian" came to be an axiom for the immoral lifestyle.

The establishment of a church in this most inhospitable moral climate is described by the historian Luke in Acts chapter 18. Paul arrived there from Athens and found Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and he began persuading both Jews and Greeks to accept Christ, initially by preaching in the synagogues where Jews assembled on the Sabbath for worship. Silas and Timothy joined him from Macedonia and notable converts included Justus who lived next to the synagogue and Crispus who ruled it. Paul remained there for 18 months in spite of terrific opposition from the local Jews.

Second Corinthians is a more positive letter than its predecessor because the church had responded with contrition and action. Paul is happily able to write and commend the church for doing the right things, but he also renews his warnings about false apostles who were threatening the congregation. He continues to urge them to complete their offering for the needy saints in Judea as well.

Second Corinthians is an intensely personal letter as it describes the improvement in Paul's relationship with the deeply troubled congregation.

One of the chief issues in First Corinthians was the church's tolerance of a member who had married his stepmother. Not only were they reluctant to do anything about his behavior, they actually seemed proud of how tolerant they were being. After Paul's commands, however, they withdrew themselves from him and it becomes apparent that he had repented. Now Paul has to tell them to renew their fellowship with him.

Throughout the letter, Paul is compelled to prove his apostleship to the church that was being invaded by false apostles who denied Paul's authority and exerted their own insidious influence. These false ministers taught a false gospel and Paul contrasts its fleshly message with the spiritual gospel that he had taught them in person and in letter. Paul confesses to being jealous over the church's affection because they were being wooed away by those who taught error.

The discouragement and disappointment that Paul felt regarding the troubled church prevails throughout Second Corinthians. In addition to the persecution he suffered, the fact that these beloved brethren had come to doubt and even rebuff him was a source of great emotional pain. Still, in sizing up his sacrifices and hardships, he was thankful to serve Christ and to be able to look forward to eternity in Heaven.

As in Romans and Galatians, if not also in Hebrews where his authorship is questionable, Paul uses Second Corinthians to contrast the old and new covenants, arguing for the superiority of the latter. The glory that faded away in Moses's era was intended to be permanent and deeper through Christ. In spite of the hardships in this tent—this life—the hope of heaven should renew the spirit day by day.

The collection to aid the needy saints in Judea is brought up again and Paul's words help to form the pattern by which Christians give to the work of the local church even today. The first letter specified that a collection should be made each Sunday, but this letter gets more to the attitude that must be behind such sacrifice.

A compelling part of the letter takes up much of chapter 12 where the apostle humbly broaches the subject of a spiritual journey into the third heaven, or the abode of God. He acknowledges the temptation to take pride in such insight, but states that a certain thorn in his flesh was provided to keep him humble—a messenger of Satan which God refused to remove in spite of Paul's pleas. The thorn seems to represent something other than the literal, but its exact identity is unknown, although there is some evidence that Paul did have a physical malady—possibly regarding his eyesight (Gal. 4:13-14).

Lesson 1: Integrity

Second Corinthians 1:1-24

1. This opening passage seems to have written by a single-minded apostle. Is he an authority on suffering and tribulation (cf. Second Corinthians 11:23-29 and Second Timothy 3:12).

2. This passage probably had a special importance to the faithful group in Corinth that eschewed the factions and doubters of Paul's authenticity. What suffering might they have experienced because of their tenacity toward the factious?

3. How is the term "saint" used in scripture—to refer to a select group of meritoriously better Christians, or all genuine disciples of Christ?

4. What word or idea is repeated continuously in this passage? How is it to be obtained?

5. How did the Corinthians help Paul when he was in grave danger?

6. Paul speaks of affliction in Asia. Some surmise that he speaks of one event in particular. Refer to Acts 19:23-20:1 and describe briefly what happened.

7. The meaning of verse 13 is that Paul is not writing to them anything which they will be unable to understand. What significance has this in our age? Compare to Ephesians 3:4.

8. In what did Paul boast?

9. What were Paul's plans concerning a visit to Corinth (cf. First Corinthians 16:5-7). This passage implies that he had not made it there yet. What opportunity do you think this gave his detractors in Corinth?

10. What was given to these men as an earnest, or guarantee, of salvation?

11. How was Paul sparing them by avoiding another visit to Corinth?

Lesson 2: Forgiveness

Second Corinthians 2:1-17

1. Was the corrective nature of the first epistle an easy thing for Paul to do? Why do you think he did it anyway?

2. Who is the one likely spoken of in verses 5-11 (cf. First Corinthians 5)? Describe his case.

3. Is it sufficiently apparent that the man in question had repented? What did Paul instruct the church to do with him now?

4. It seems that Paul's difficult instruction to withdraw had been a test of sorts to see if the Corinthians would be obedient. What might this tell us about the importance of exercising church discipline?

5. What are some of Satan's devices?

6. What is the smell of Christians carrying God's word to a lost world?

7. Paul wrote the first epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus. Describe his subsequent travels as detailed here. How does Paul compare himself to the self-interested teachers (verse 17)?

8. How are some guilty of peddling the gospel today?

Lesson 3: Ministry of the Spirit

Second Corinthians 3:1-18

1. Paul takes up the issue of letters of commendation. His opponents boast that they had them while Paul, for some reason, was unable to produce any like them from other apostles or churches. How does Paul answer this request here and in First Corinthians 9:1-2?

2. What famous code of law was written on tablets of stone?

3. From where does sufficiency come?

4. What does Paul mean when he says, “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”?

5. What was it about the glory reflected on Moses’s face that caused him to veil it?

6. How does Paul describe the law of Moses, under which he had spent most of his life?

a. verse 7:

b. verse 9:

c. verse 11:

7. According to verse 13, what was Moses concealing when he veiled his face from the children of Israel?

8. How is it evident that non-Christian Jews were reading the Old Testament with a veiled heart?

9. What is found where the Lord is? What does this mean (cf. Romans 6:15-20)?

Lesson 4: Earthen Vessels

Second Corinthians 4:1-18

1. Whom does Paul call the god of this world?
2. What is he busy doing according to verse 4? What light does he wish to prevent from shining?
3. What methods had Paul and the other saints renounced?
4. What method had they adopted?
5. Explain what is meant by the phrase “treasure in earthen vessels”?

6. What did they manifest in their own bodies? How can we do this today?

7. Paul's life as a Christian was a perilous one and yet he persevered. He relates the source of his confidence in verse 14—what is it? Compare to Second Timothy 1:12.

8. With what attitude did Paul view his afflictions?

9. How can we renew our inward selves day by day?

10. What is 20/20 Christian vision like?

Lesson 5: Reconciliation

Second Corinthians 5:1-21

1. Paul did not particularly worry about dying for he trusted in what reward?

2. Can we share his hope of a heavenly home, eternal above?

3. What does it mean to walk by faith, not by sight?

4. For how long will we be present with the Lord when this life is over?

5. In a way, he issues a challenge to his detractors in Corinth to test themselves. What is the goal of a Christian (verse 9)?

6. What will be judged in the last day?

7. How is the terror of the Lord a persuasive message?

8. What compelled Paul to do what he did?

9. Paul says that he is not trying to glorify himself, but rather to offer the saints an answer to his enemies who glory in appearance and not in heart. Consider Colossians 3:1-3, 9-10: where should a Christian's mind be set?

10. What must become of the old man and his deeds?

11. Paul now speaks of his ministry as reconciliation. What two parties are to be reconciled, according to verse 19? By whom?

Lesson 6: Unequally Yoked

Second Corinthians 6:1-18

1. What are the implications of verse 2?
2. Was it possible for someone to blame his lack of faith on Paul's habits?
3. Briefly summarize the report Paul gave on his own ministry here.
4. What did Paul ask of the Corinthians as they read this letter?
5. What is Paul's command in verse 14? What is his initial reasoning?

6. What is meant by the term “Belial”?

7. What is the temple of the living God?

8. What is Paul’s command to those who are in unequal yokes?

9. Why are unbelievers so threatening to Christians (First Corinthians 15:33)?

Lesson 7: Repentance

Second Corinthians 7:1-16

1. How do we cleanse ourselves from filthiness (First John 1:9, First Peter 3:20-21)?

2. What three accusations does Paul deny in verse 2?
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

3. How had Paul's boldness of speech been revealed in these two letters?

4. What brought comfort to Paul when he was in Macedonia?

5. Why was this a source of comfort?

6. Did Paul regret making the Corinthians feel bad with his first letter? Why or why not?

7. Why is it sometimes beneficial to feel badly (cf. Matthew 5:3, James 4:8-10)?

8. What does godly sorrow produce?

9. What does worldly sorrow produce?

10. What was Paul's main concern in writing his first, stern letter?

11. How had the Corinthians received Titus? Why?

Lesson 8: Collection For Needy Saints

Second Corinthians 8:1-24

1. We often study passages on the collection in general. Where had Paul brought up the collection for the needy saints in Judea before?

2. According to verse 3, what had been the attitude of the Macedonians in their giving?

3. Define the word *fellowship* as it is used in the Bible. Then define the word as it is commonly used in the world today. Which practice should the Lord's church employ and uphold?

4. Why did Paul then send Titus to Corinth?

5. Paul gives another example of free giving in verse 9—what is it? Refer to Philippians 2:5-8—what is the admonition and example there?

6. Paul applauds the fact that the Corinthians had begun this work nearly a year ago, but now advises them to “complete the doing of it” (verse 11). Did Paul teach that good intentions are good enough?

7. He sets forth a policy from the Old Testament that should ensure that some Christians do not die from poverty while others bask in luxury. Explain this policy.

8. Who traveled with Titus?

9. Why was trust so important?

Lesson 9: Generosity

Second Corinthians 9:1-15

1. Paul says that he has boasted of the Corinthians and used them as an example of giving to the Macedonians, too. Why has he sent the brethren ahead now to Corinth?

2. What can the zeal of one person do?

3. What would make Paul ashamed?

4. What would cause people to give as a grudging obligation?

5. From what does Paul draw an illustration for monetary contributions?

6. Verse seven contains two positive and two negative aspects of giving. List the positive ones first:

a.

b.

7. List the negative aspects:

a.

b.

8. What was to be their reward?

9. Look back to Second Corinthians 8:4 and 9:1, 12—for whom was this gift? Is there any indication this collection was for non-saints?

Lesson 10: Spiritual Warfare

Second Corinthians 10:1-18

1. Paul begins his defense by calling on his readers to think spiritually and beyond outward appearances. Did he wage warfare physically?

2. How did he war?

3. What does Paul mean by “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”?

4. What did some people say about Paul’s letters and appearance?

5. What did Paul say about the contrast between his letters and his appearance?

6. Paul sets up a model of contrast between himself and the false brethren who opposed him. How did the false measure themselves?

7. How did Paul measure himself?

8. What is the measure of genuine commendation?

Lesson II: Deception

Second Corinthians 11:1-33

1. What is godly jealousy?
2. What happened to Eve and can also happen to us?
3. Should they have put up with those teaching another gospel or another Christ (cf. Galatians 1:6-9)?
4. Paul confesses that what criticism is accurate?
5. The apostle brings up the argument that he had accepted no payment for preaching because his conscience would not allow him to accept an apostle's reward. How was Paul's livelihood provided for when he preached in Corinth?

6. Fed up with such a foolish attack, he goes on the offensive. What three fraudulent claims does Paul accuse such men of committing?

a.

b.

c.

7. How do the works and temptations of Satan appear harmless today?

8. Paul endeavors to turn the tables once more on the boastful teachers. He judges their submission to false teaching in verses 19-21. Does he feel that they should sit meekly at their feet and continue to work with them?

9. In this passage, does Paul boast of the usual points of pride (number of baptisms, revered writings, successful debates, marvelous miracles)?

10. According to verse 30, of what does he boast?

6. How is Paul's gift for biting sarcasm displayed here?

7. What did Paul seek in Corinth? What did he not seek?

8. In what ways did Paul act as a father to them in this letter?

9. How did some accuse Paul of catching them—getting their money?

6. What is the implication of disqualification?

7. Was Paul's boldness and sharpness authorized? By whom?

8. Can gospel preachers who are not apostles also be sharp in their rebukes when required (Titus 1:13)?

9. Paul concludes the epistle with a prayer for peace and unity. After studying these two epistles, do you think Paul desired them to believe and teach different things and follow after the teachings of various men?

10. Do people still obey the command to greet one another with a holy kiss?

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